

Washington State Patrol Media Release

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WSP Receives Federal Grant to Eliminate Backlog of Convicted Offender DNA Samples

Chief Ronal Serpas announced today the Washington State Patrol Crime Lab Division has received a federal grant from the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) that will allow the crime labs to eliminate its backlog of unanalyzed convicted offender DNA samples. The NIJ grant of \$1.86 million provides the means to outsource the typing of the backlogged offender DNA samples to a private DNA typing laboratory. Agreement between the WSP and the forensic scientists bargaining unit was reached that facilitated the contracting out of these samples, making Washington eligible for the funding.

In July of 2002, the Washington State legislature established the "all felons" law, which required those convicted of any felony in Washington to submit a biological sample to the Crime Lab Division for inclusion in a statewide database. Three gross misdemeanors are also included under the law: harassment, stalking, and communicating with a minor for immoral purposes. Prior to this change, the law provided that only those convicted of a sex offense or other violent offense could be put into the database.

The WSP DNA database currently includes almost 35,000 samples entered. Since the new law was enacted in 2002, the CLD has received an additional 33,000 felon samples and receives around 2,000 more samples each month. These samples have been cataloged but not tested due to a lack of available funding.

The CLD felon database has been very successful in providing investigators another tool for solving crimes where there is no identified suspect. Over the past several years, the CLD has had over 80 "hits" where evidence from cases has been linked to a suspect through the felon database. Several cases where DNA from the crime scene has been linked to suspects through the database include the 1993 murder of Mia Zapata and a suspect who was living in Florida; the murder of Virginia Taylor in 1982 and the identification of a suspect in New Mexico in 2002; and a sexual assault in Georgia in 2002 that was later linked to a suspect who had been convicted in Washington in 1998.

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